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THE
Duties *and* Dignities
OF
GOSPEL MINISTERS,

Set forth in a
S E R M O N,

PREACHED AT
Glass-house-yard, in Goswell-street,
L O N D O N.

BEFORE A
SOCIETY of MINISTERS at their
Annual Meeting, *June the 9th, 1742.*

*But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that
the excellency of the power may be of God, and
not of us. 2 Cor. iv. 7.*

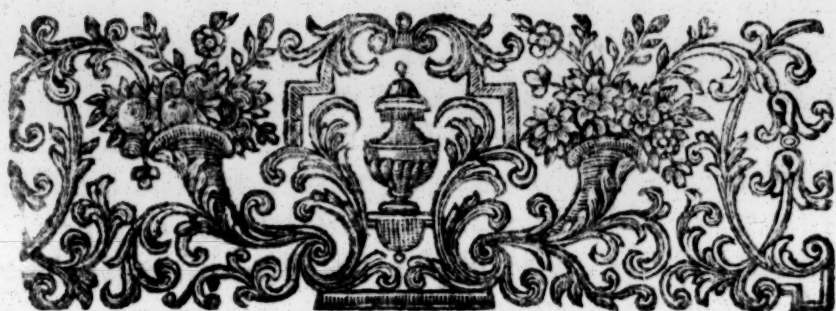
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THE
DUTIES and DIGNITIES
OF
GOSPEL MINISTERS.

1 THESS. II. 7.

*But we were gentle among you, even as a
-nurse cherisheth her children.*

HE wise man hath a saying,
that *every thing is beautiful in
its time*^a. Inasmuch as you (my
brethren and fathers in the mi-
nistry) have assigned this pro-
vince to me at this season, I
presume your expectations are, that I should
say something with respect to the ministry.
My purpose is to lay before you (as God may
assist) the duties and dignities of gospel mini-
sters. The apostle *Paul*, in the fourth verse of
A 2 this

^a Eccl. iii. 11.

this chapter, tells the Christians of their mission from God, that they *were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel* ; and then tells them how they had behaved themselves in that trust, that they had *not at any time used flattering words, nor a cloke of covetousness* ; nor had they *sought glory of men* ; neither had they *been burdensome as the apostles of Christ*. And for the truth of these things, they appeal to the people's own knowledge, saying, *as ye know* ; moreover they appeal to God that knows all things ; saying, *God is witness* ; and in the words of the text, the Apostle is giving a further beautiful account of his and his brethren's conduct and behaviour among the Christians (which is worthy of our imitation) saying, *but we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children*. From which words I humbly conceive the duties and dignities of gospel ministers are to be inferred. As it is the duty of ministers to be gentle among Christians, and to labour to cherish them in their faith, and hope, and comfort in God, even so the faithful discharge of their duty confers honour upon them ; *the elders that rule well are worthy of double honour, especially they that labour in the word and doctrine* ^a.

I shall endeavour to lay before you, in the *first* place, the duties of the ministerial function.

Secondly, The honour and dignity of it. And,

Thirdly, Conclude with some application.

And *First*, In laying before you the duties of the ministerial office, I shall endeavour to draw
a parallel

^a 1 Tim. v. 17.

a parallel between the office of a nurse, and that of a minister. And,

First, The office of a nurse is a very useful office. — What poor helpless creatures are we when we come into the world! The deplorable state of lost fallen man is set forth (by the prophet) by an infant in the day of its birth, *cast out in the open field, to the lothing of its person, neither washed at all, nor swaddled at all*^a. O what objects of pity and compassion are we when we come into the world! without the kind interposition of the tender-hearted nurse, we must inevitably perish! How useful then is the nurse to cherish the feeble helpless child! Without this necessary office, there could be no husbandmen in the field, no mariners in the ship, no merchants on the change, no senators in the senate-house, no king on the throne. In a word, we all owe the preservation of our beings (under God) to the compassionate nurses that cherished us in our helpless state. So in like manner the good minister is as useful as the good nurse. No doubt there are bad ministers, as well as bad nurses in the world; and there is no need of a hue-and-cry to find them out; for by their fruits ye may know them. The good nurses, and the good ministers, are marked out in our text; *they are gentle, and cherish their children*. All Christians are not of the same growth and strength. All Christians are listed under the banner of Christ; and the Apostle *John* draws them up in battle-array against the common enemy in three lines; those of the first line he calls little children; those of the second line he calls fathers; and those of the third line he

^a Ezek. xvi. 4, 5.

he calls young men; and he speaks very different of them. Of the little children he says, *that they knew the Father, and that their sins were forgiven them for his name's sake*: Of the fathers he saith, *that they had known him* (that is, Christ) *which is from the beginning*: And of the young men he saith, *that the word of God abided in them, that they were strong, and had overcome the wicked one^a*. The Apostle *John* does not say that the little children were strong, but his labour was to cherish them, that they might be so. The whole work of the ministry is laid down by the Apostle *Paul* in these two expressions, *viz. planting, and watering; I have planted* (saith he) *and Apollos hath watered*. The Apostle *Paul* was a rare planter; he laboured in an abundant manner to preach Christ, even where he was not named. This mission, which he received immediately from Christ, runs in these words, *I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles, to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God^b*. *Apollos* was as good at watering, as *Paul* was at planting. We read that he *helped them much which had believed through grace^c*: And how he helped them, appears in these words, he was *an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures; and mightily convinced the Jews, shewing, by the scriptures, that Jesus was Christ*; and by this means (no doubt) *he helped them much, which had believed through grace*, in their faith, and hope, and comfort in Christ. The Apostle *Paul* tells us, that when Christ ascended up on high, he gave gifts unto men, *and he gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists,*
and

^a 1 John ii. 12, 13, 14.
xviii. 27.

^b Acts xxvi. 18.

^c Acts

and some pastors, and teachers. And the end and design of the Lord Jesus Christ is expressed in these words, *for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ*^a. Hence appears the great usefulness of the work of the ministry. O how usefully are we employed, when we are made instrumental in the hand of God, to pull poor sinners as brands out of the burning; to recover them out of the snare of the Devil, who are led captive by him at his will; to bring them out of darkness, and translate them into the kingdom of God's dear Son; to give the knowledge of salvation by the remission of sin. And when poor sinners are brought within the bond of the everlasting covenant; when they are brought home to Christ, and are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; O how useful a work is it to confirm their souls, to strengthen their hands in God, to help their joy, to encourage their faith, that the joy of Christ may remain in them, and that their joy may be full. I speak not these things to stir up ministers to crow over their brethren, but to exalt the free grace of God, in putting such treasures in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may appear to be of God, and not of man. We read of the men of Cyprus, how they *spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus; and the hand of the Lord was with them; and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord*^b. Hence the Apostle saith, *who then is Paul, or who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered,*

^a Eph. iv. 11, 12.

^b Acts xi. 20, 21.

watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase^a. In all our ways then let us acknowledge God, and remember that his blessing maketh rich. If we are so happy as to see our ministry successful, let us give the glory to God. And may both ministers and people earnestly pray to the Lord, that his gospel may run and be glorified; that our eyes may be blessed in seeing, and our ears in hearing, the kingdom of God coming with power. But,

*Secondly, As the office of a nurse is useful, so it is a very difficult office. O how many difficulties lie in the nurse's way, in feeding and clothing the helpless infant, of which I need not here speak particularly; so in like manner the minister meets with many difficulties in the discharge of the duties of his calling. The greatest difficulties of all (in my opinion) arise from the different dispositions of persons that frequent Christian assemblies. It is with Christian assemblies as it was with the ark, *there enters the clean and the unclean*. Into the ark indeed the clean entered by sevens, and the unclean by pairs only; I wish the parallel might hold good to Christian assemblies: But why should I thus wish? Is it not better to wish that the unclean may enter by hundreds and by thousands, and that God would make his ministers sons of thunder to awaken them, that *they may flee from the wrath to come, and lay hold on the hope which God hath set before them*. If all Christian assemblies were like that rare assembly at *Cornelius's* house, of whom he thus speaks, *we are all here present before God, to hear all**

^a 1 Cor. iii. 5, 6, 7.

all things that are commanded thee of God? there would then indeed be no great difficulty to nourish them with the sincere milk of the word. But alas, Christian assemblies are mixed multitudes, some fearing God, and some fearing him not. Here may be one awakened sinner that is humbling himself before God, being broken in heart, and contrite in spirit, hungering and thirsting after righteousness. It may be that in the same seat with him is a stout-hearted sinner, that is far from righteousness, *who setteth his mouth against the heavens, and whose tongue is walking through the earth; and the thought of whose heart is in all evil in the midst of the congregation.* Now how shall a minister be a son of thunder to the one, and a son of consolation to the other? The difficulty ariseth here. Whilst the minister is thundering the law from mount *Sinai* upon the stout-hearted sinner, the broken in heart are apt to make a handle of it to despair: and while the minister is a son of consolation to the feeble-minded, the stout-hearted sinner is ready to make a handle of it to presume.

Methinks I would not start a difficulty, and leave it without proposing a remedy; permit me therefore, my brethren and fathers in the ministry, to point out to you how this difficulty is to be warded against, and how we may at least secure ourselves, so as to be pure from the blood of all men.

Let us then cast our eyes upon the Captain of our salvation, the great Shepherd of the sheep. Let us copy after his example, who tells us, *that he calleth his own sheep by name*^a. Let us mark well his conduct; when he de-

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nounced

^a John x. 3.

nounced woes, he mentioned the sinners by name that were entitled to them, describing them by their actions; and when he pronounced blessings, he plainly mentions the persons entitled to them. Even so let us call upon the dead sinner by name, and say, *awake thou that sleepest, arise from the dead*. Let us call upon the broken-hearted by name, and say, *who is among you that feareth the Lord, and obeyeth the voice of his servant; that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay himself upon his God^a*. Let us give the sinner due warning, and the feeble Christian due comfort; this (if I deem right) is what our Lord calls, *giving to every one his portion of meat in due season^b*. But then

Thirdly, The office of a nurse, (as it is difficult) it justly demands continual care, constant diligence, unwearied patience, and undaunted courage. A careless person is not fit for a nurse. A good nurse hath a continual care upon her night and day to provide proper food for her child, and to watch and ward against the many dangers that it is exposed to. So in like manner, a minister must take the oversight of the house of God, and be affectionately desirous of the good of souls. They who think that a minister may live without care, are altogether strangers to the work of the ministry. The Apostle *Paul* having mentioned a great sight of afflictions that he had endured, he speaks of them as an additional weight; (in these words) *besides those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches^c*. The Apostle *Paul* was not always under stripes and imprisonment, he was not always enduring

hunger,

^a Isa. l. 10.

^b Luke xii. 42.

^c 2 Cor. xi. 28.

hunger, cold, and nakedness: but there was one burden that he was never free from, even the care of all the churches; that burden was always resting upon and pinching his shoulders.

A minister *must take heed to himself, and to his doctrine*, (as the Apostle exhorted Timothy) *that he may both save himself, and them that hear him*^a.

2dly, A nurse must be constantly diligent in attending on her charge committed to her. A slothful indolent person is not fit for a nurse. So likewise a minister must diligently attend on the duties of his calling. In the parable of the talents, our Lord calls the *diligent, good and faithful*; and the *slothful, wicked and unprofitable*. The denominations given to ministers in the scriptures, are such as bespeak that they ought to be very diligent. They are called workmen, servants, and stewards, and soldiers, and labourers, and therefore ought not to be loiterers; they are called watchmen, not slumberers: It was the character of the false prophets that infested the church of old, that they were *sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber*^b. A minister ought to give attendance to reading and meditation, that his profiting may appear to all. He must by no means *neglect the gift of God that is in him*, but *study to shew himself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*^c. May we all copy after the brave Apollos, of whom it is written, *that he was fervent in spirit, and taught diligently the things of the Lord!* But

3dly, A nurse must be of unwearied patience. She must not be fired with the little indiscretions of her children; she must patiently wait and watch over them for their good; for she

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may

^a 1 Tim. iv. 16. ^b Isa. lvi. 10, 11. ^c 2 Tim. ii. 15,

may well expect to meet with many things to try her patience. So likewise a minister must *let patience have her perfect work, that he may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.* He must remember, that *the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men; apt to teach, patient. In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are led captive by him at his will^a.* Hence I observe, that if a minister be to be gentle to the worst of men, even such as are led of the devil, if they are meekly to instruct them, how much more such as are led by the Spirit of God: *such as are weak in the faith, they are to receive, but not to doubtful disputations, which they are not qualified to understand.* They must copy after the example of the great Shepherd of the sheep, who taught his Disciples as they were able to bear it. As a nurse must exercise patience in feeding her children, even so must a minister. He must not be a furioso, driving all before the impetuous tide of his passion; he must not be self-willed; he must be no striker; he must be patient, not a brawler, not soon angry, but a lover of good men; sober, holy, just, and temperate. And 4thly, A nurse must be of undaunted courage; she must not be of a timorous disposition, subject to be frightened and scared at every exigence that may happen; so likewise a minister must be of a good courage, not soon dismayed, nor terrified at any threatening dangers that may be in the way. When the Apostles were threatened by the Jewish rulers, being let go, they

^a 2 Tim. ii. 24, 25, 26.

they went to their own company, and lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and prayed that he would *grant that with all boldness they might speak his word*^a. And the Apostle Paul at Rome preached *the kingdom of God, and the things concerning the Lord Jesus, with all confidence*. And indeed, the divine, important, and eternal truths of the gospel, ought to be published with all becoming earnestness and decent boldness; for a dry, cold, lukewarm delivery of gospel truths may prove a snare and a stumbling-block to some poor souls, who may be tempted to think that the minister himself scarcely believes the things which he so coldly delivers. If a minister want courage, how shall he testify to the world that the deeds thereof are evil; how can he lift up his voice as a trumpet, to shew the people their transgressions and their sins? To do this, he must set his face as a flint, and must not fear the faces of men. The holy Apostles, they laboured, and they suffered reproach, because they trusted in the living God; so ought every minister to trust in the Lord, and be of good courage. Every minister must, as a good soldier, endure hardness; he may expect to meet with dishonour, and with evil report. The Apostle Paul gives this account of the sufferings and conduct of himself, and of the rest of his brethren, in these words, *We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed*^b. The same Apostle tells us, that although *the Holy Ghost witnessed, that in every city bonds and afflictions should abide him; yet none of these things moved him, neither counted he his life dear unto himself,*

^a Acts iv. 29.

^b 2 Cor. iv. 8, 9.

himself, so that he might finish his course with joy, and the ministry which he had received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God^a. Thus it becomes every minister of the gospel to act. But then,

5thly, The office of a nurse is an honourable office. I the rather take notice of this, because it hath been complained of by some for above an age last past, that some mothers have thought scorn to nurse their own children; not considering (it may be) that the mother of our Lord, whom all generations (deservedly) call blessed, did not disdain to perform the office of a nurse to her own son, our Lord. The office is so useful, that the richest of mothers need not be ashamed of it; and as for those poor indigent women that supply the place of rich mothers, or are assistant to them in nursing their children, if they use the office of a nurse well, if they exercise themselves in taking continual care, and using constant diligence, unwearied patience, and undaunted courage, they, for their work's sake, are justly entitled to respect and esteem. So in like manner the work of the ministry is an honourable work. The Apostle Paul saith, *Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine*^b. The Apostle Paul could say in his day, *ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called*^c. And I suppose that in all ages since, God has chosen his ministers (generally speaking) out of the middle and lowest rank of men, to answer (it may be) the same good ends that the Apostle mentioneth, *viz. that the*

^a Acts xx. 23, 24. ^b 1 Tim. v. 17. ^c 1 Cor. i. 26.

the excellence of the power may appear to be of God, and not of man; and that no flesh might glory in his presence^a. But how noble soever any man may be, whom God calls to this work, he can have no just reason to be ashamed of it. The potent king Solomon (though *he reigned over all the kings, from the river to the land of the Philistines, and to the border of Egypt*^b) yet he, without reluctance, calls himself the preacher, saying, *I the preacher was king in Jerusalem*^c. Let me here point out to you, that all the honour which is due to a minister ariseth from his work. It is for his work's sake that he is to be esteemed very highly in love. *We beseech you (saith the Apostle) to know them that are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake*^d. Not for their high descent, not for their splendid equipage, nor their temporal manors and lordships; all these things are out of the question; it is only for their work's sake that they are to be esteemed very highly in love. So then if a minister were as rich and potent as Solomon, unless he ruled well, unless he laboured in the word and doctrine, there is no honour due to him as a minister. On the other hand, if a minister be as poor as Job, if he take the oversight of the flock of God, and rule well, and labour in the word and doctrine, he is to be counted worthy of double honour, and to be esteemed very highly in love for his work's sake. And this leads me to the

Second head of my discourse, which is to shew the honours and dignities of gospel ministers. Their honour is of a higher and better nature

^a 2 Cor. iv. 7. ¹ Cor. i. 29. ^b 2 Chron. ix. 26.
^c Eccl. i. 12. ^d 1 Theff. v. 12, 13.

nature than the honour which the scribes of old grasped after, *the uppermost rooms at feasts, the chief seats in the synagogues, greetings in the markets, and to be called of men Rabbi, Rabbi.* These are dry empty things, when compared to the substantial honours which ministers enjoy; they are such as the world cannot give, nor take away. And,

First, Their work is their honour. If it be an honour to a man to be usefully employed, the minister, above all men, is most usefully employed, when he is persuading men to *flee from wrath to come, to lay hold on Christ by faith, to the saving of their souls:* When he is *perfecting the saints, and edifying the body of Christ:* when a minister is thus labouring, his work is his honour.

Secondly, The appellations and denominations given them in the sacred writings, shew their honour. They are not only called the servants, but *the stewards of God*^a. They are called *workers and labourers together with God*^b. What an honour is this, to be on the Lord's side; to be engaged not only in the Lord's work, but to be a *labourer together with God; for God is, in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, and his ministers are calling upon and beseeching of poor sinners to be reconciled to God.* God and they are engaged in the same work, and so have the honour to be *labourers together with God.* The whole Christian church is indeed a kingdom of priests. The Apostle Peter calleth the whole church a *royal priesthood, and an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ*^c; and the church triumphant above, are singing to the glory of Christ,

^a 1 Cor. iv. 1. ^b 1 Cor. iii. 9. ^c 1 Pet. ii. 5, 9.

Christ, *thou wast slain, and hast made us kings and priests unto our God*^a. Nay, the whole church is God's clergy; this honour hath all the saints. The Apostle *Peter* plainly calls them that are taught in the word, *God's heritage*; charging *the elders not to be lords over God's heritage*. The whole church is Christ's peculiar inheritance, *which he has purchased with his own blood, to be the first fruits unto God from among men*^b. I marvel that any men should think to exalt themselves as ministers, by debasing the church, and representing their hearers as little more than innocent beasts of burden, which they are to have the rule and dominion over with a rod of iron. One would think that a starving laity could be no credit to a pampered clergy. One would think that God never designed to turn the tables in *Pharaoh's* dream, and send the fat kine to eat up the lean. But the truth is, every good minister copies after the Apostle, and esteems the people that he hath the oversight of, *as his glory, his hope, his joy, and crown of rejoicing in the presence of Christ, at his coming*^c. The honour of the church reflects honour upon her ministers. The top honour of the church is this, she is God's heritage; God is in the midst of her, that she may not be moved. The church is God's vineyard, and he disdains not to be the husbandman to prune and purge it, and to watch over it night and day. Hence ariseth a peculiar honour to those whom God sets in his church, to take the oversight thereof; in doing this, they are *labourers together with God, in perfecting the saints, and edifying the body of Christ*.

C

Thirdly,

^a Rev. ix. 10. ^b Rev. xiv. 4. ^c 1 Thess. ii. 19, 20.

Thirdly, Another honour which Christ put upon his ministers is, he holds them in his right-hand of protection and approbation. The great Shepherd of the sheep gives this beautiful representation of his whole church, *that they are in his hands*; and he exultingly says, *none shall pluck them out of my hands. My father which gave them me is greater than all, and none is able to pluck them out of my father's hand. I and my father are one*^a. John in vision saw Christ holding seven stars in his right-hand; and this is explained to be the seven angels, or messengers, or ministers, of the seven churches in Asia^b. We cannot suppose that this was a peculiar honour to those seven men only; no, *he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever*. He holdeth all his ministers (yea all his people) in his right-hand throughout all generations. When our Lord made Paul a minister, he promised him his protection, to deliver him from the people to whom he sent him. Christ's right-hand betokeneth honour, safety and approbation. Christ honours his ministers with his mission, and protection in this world, and he will honour them (and his whole church) with his approbation at his appearing, saying, *well done good and faithful servants, enter into the joy of your Lord*.

Fourthly, All the ministers of Christ shall be honoured with a crown of glory *that fadeth not away at the appearing of Christ*^c. The ministers of Christ (and all his people) are the objects of his care and pleasure; he will comfort them here, and crown them hereafter, with an incorruptible crown of righteousness, life and glory. I come now in the

Third

^a John x. 28, 29.

^b Rev. i. 20.

^c 1 Pet. v. 4.

Third and last place, to make the application of what I have been speaking of to three sorts of persons, which I presume will take in all of you. And,

First, To all you (my brethren) that are taught in the word. Let me intreat you, my dear Christian hearers, to *desire earnestly the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby*. Remember, O Christian hearers, that it is for your sakes that Christ giveth gifts unto men; it is that you may be perfected and edified, that you may be rooted in faith, and grounded in love, and be rendered compleat in him, who is the head of all principalities and power. You have heard of what care and diligence, what patience and courage, we are to exercise in the preaching of the word; may this put you in mind that you should exercise the same virtues in hearing. O make conscience of frequenting Christian assemblies! O how sad and lamentable is the case of such as sleep away, and sport away, and sot away sermon opportunities; and such as drop into Christian assemblies, and go away unedified, is it not because they come unprepared; they come peradventure to spy out the deformity of the preacher, or to make some observations, or to catch up some words, to make merry with at the tavern, or tea-table? No wonder that such go empty away. If they should be made wiser, or better, it would be more than they desired. But I am persuaded better things of you; nevertheless, suffer, I beseech you, a word of exhortation; labour to come into Christian assemblies with a due sense of God and religion upon your minds. Bring honest
C 2 hearts

hearts with you, that you may *receive the word with*
readiness of mind, and search the scriptures, to see
whether the things are so. Labour to be as good
 hearers as *Cornelius* and his kinsfolks were, who
 were all present before, *to hear all things that*
were commanded of God. Consider the great en-
 couragement the Lord Jesus hath given you
 to frequent Christian assemblies; he hath pro-
 mised, that *where two or three are met in his*
name, he will be in the midst. O it is good to
 be in that company, where Christ maketh one
 amongst them! Never say, therefore, I will not
 go out to-day, for there will be but few there
 to-day; for whoever fails, Christ never fails;
 he is never absent from Christian assemblies.
 O it is good being where Christ comes! The
 impotent man at *Bethesda's* pool never met
 with cure till Christ came thither; and the
 blind man at *Jericho* never met with comfort
 and cure till Christ passed by. Hear the com-
 fortable words of Christ, in his word thus
 speaking to you: *hearken unto me, O ye children,*
for blessed are they that keep my ways. Hear in-
 struction and be wise, and refuse it not: *Blessed is*
the man that heareth me, watching daily at my
gates, waiting at the posts of my doors; for when-
so findeth me, findeth life, and shall obtain favour of
the Lord. O Sirs, it is good watching at Christ's
 gates, and waiting at his doors! O come hun-
 gering and thirsting after his righteousness,
 and he will not send you empty away! You
 shall find him, and find life through him, and
 obtain favour of the Lord. What can you,
 what would you have more? You have heard
 this day how gentle the Apostles were among
 the Christians; and I charitably hope and trust
 your ministers are such as tread in their steps:

and if so, suffer a word of exhortation on this topic also. Take heed that you despise them not for their gentleness. Some ministers that have affected dominion over their brethren's faith, more than to be helpers of their joy, have met with better treatment than they deserved; whilst others, that have not put on such lordly airs, have been despised for their gentleness; and if some ministers were here, they might speak feelingly of these things. Remember, my dear hearers, that we are *to preach Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus sake*. And as *Abraham's* servants were a part of his riches, so your ministers are a part of your riches; but pray do not treat us worse than your servants; and if you will be so good as to value us as much as you do your riches, I make no doubt but that we shall be happy enough in that respect. The Apostle *Paul* (without any reluctance) put himself by name (with *Apollos* and *Cephas*) into the churches inventory, and openly declared *that they were all theirs*^a. Lastly, be earnest with God in prayer, that he would bless your endeavours, and your minister's labours, with good success; and be thankful to God for all his benefits. *Enter in at his gates with thanksgiving, and come into his courts with praise; be thankful unto the Lord, and bless his name.*

Secondly, Let me apply what I have said to all such (if any such are here) who in times of old were called the sons of the prophets, or in other words, any young men, or others, whose hearts the Lord hath touched, and is working upon them by prevailing motions to engage in the ministerial work. Be entreated

to

^a 1 Cor. iii. 20.

to wait on the Lord, and beg of him to cause you to know the way in which you should walk ; and if the Almighty should make you affectionately desirous for the good of souls, and make you willing to spend and be spent for the good of souls ; if this should be the happy case of any of you, I bid you God speed ; I wish you good success in the name of the Lord. Remember to *hold fast the form of sound words*, even the wholesome words of the Lord Jesus Christ. Do not *mind endless genealogies, nor regard old wives fables ; turn not aside after vain jangling, nor follow after doubtful disputations ;* but always bear in mind, *that those who work in the ministry must perfect the saints, and edify the body of Christ, with the sincere milk of the word.* I forbear to say more, for this is drawing a bow at a venture, and may be speaking unto the air ; but if I am so happy as to speak to any such who are on the threshold of the ministry, I beseech you to listen with attention to the

Third and last part of the application of this discourse, which is to myself and the rest of my brethren and fathers in the ministry here present. And

1st. May we often call to mind the many strivings of heart, and convictions of mind, and prevailing motions which we had in our own breasts, before we engaged in this work, and also the comfortable experiences which we have enjoyed since our entrance into the ministry ; how God hath owned us in the work, by shining into our hearts, and by blessing our ministry to some poor souls, either to conversion, or comfort after conversion ; for, a clear evidence of our being called of God to this

this work, will be of great use to us. Without this witness in ourselves, with what face can we appear in the church of God? Nay, how can we forgive ourselves for running before we were sent? But if we have a clear testimony in our own hearts that God hath allowed and approved us in this work, this will make us men of diligence, of patience, and of courage. Let me intreat your patience while I point out a few plain things, which you, my brethren and fathers in the ministry, know much better than I can tell you; but it may be they may be of use to one of a thousand. Know then that I apprehend that all the ministers of Jesus Christ are of his own chusing and sending. Upon consideration that the harvest was great, and the labourers few, our Lord bids his Disciples *pray the lord of the harvest that he would send labourers into his harvest*^a. The sending of labourers into the harvest, properly belongs to the lord of the harvest; and who the lord of the harvest is, will not admit of much dispute. But it may be asked. (and some may think it a knotty question) how shall a man know that God hath sent him? And how shall a people, in quest of a minister, know a man that God hath sent? To which I answer, That all the ministers of Jesus Christ are converted persons; and though conversion is no proof that a man is sent of God to preach his word, because many thousands are converted that are not sent of God; for Jesus Christ hath sheep and lambs to feed, as well as pastors to feed them; but it evidently proves, that without conversion a man is not sent of God to preach his word. Can it be imagined that Christ sends
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^a Matt. ix. 38.

his ministers any other way but through the university of regeneration? How should they preach Christ that have not learned Christ? How can it be thought that Jesus Christ sendeth men in their sins to call other men out of their sins; or men out of covenant, to bring others into the covenant? *To the wicked God saith, what hast thou to do to declare my statutes, seeing thou hatest instruction^a?* You know, my brethren, that our Lord would not let the devils trumpet about, that he was the Son of God; that sublime doctrine was more fit for him to declare, who could challenge his keenest adversaries, *which of you can accuse me of sin?* So then an unconverted person cannot be a minister of Christ; for though conversion does not prove that a man is a minister of Christ, yet the negative proves that he is not. But then all that Christ sendeth into the ministry, are not only converted, but gifted. The Apostle saith, *to every one of us is given grace, according to the measure of the gift of Christ^b.* All ministers have not the same abilities, but all have some ability. Hence the Apostle Peter saith, *if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth^c.* And as there are different measures of grace given by Jesus Christ unto his ministers, so also there are diversities of gifts which the spirit of God worketh, and divideth to every man severally as he will^d. Hence the Apostle saith, *having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministry; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that*

^a Psal. l. 16, 17.^b Eph. iv. 7.^c 1 Pet. iv. 11.^d 1 Cor. xii. 11.

that exhorteth, on exhortation ^a. Hence it appears that Christ sendeth no labourers into his vineyard without some ability to labour. Some have one gift, and some another, according to his sovereign will and pleasure. Some are best at planting, others are best at watering; some are mostly sons of thunder, whilst others are mostly sons of consolation. All ministers have not the same gifts, nor the same abilities. But I humbly conceive that there are two gifts which the Lord giveth to all his ministers, and how light soever some may think of them, I boldly assert that all the riches of the *Indies* cannot purchase them. The one is a willing mind; none but God can make a man affectionately desirous of the good of souls. Hence the Apostle *Peter* puts a willing mind in opposition to all motions arising from wealth; charging the *elders* to feed the flock of God not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind ^b. If any man run before he is sent, and crouch into the ministry for a piece of bread, he will do (in this case) as all other tradesmen do; he will like his calling in proportion to the pence arising from it; but this will come far short of a willing mind. The other gift is an inexpressible joy of heart, which is more sensibly felt than can be expressed. And these two gifts qualify a minister to fulfil his ministry. From this joy of heart and willingness of mind, a minister will not count his life dear to himself, so that he may finish his course with joy, and the ministry which he hath received of the Lord Jesus. And if any are in quest of such a minister, and say, how shall we know the man? I return this short answer,

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^a Rom. xii. 6, 7, 8.^b 1 Pet. v. 2.

By his fruits ye may know him ; for they that are after the flesh, do mind the things of the flesh ; but they that are after the spirit, do mind the things of the spirit^a. There is an inward teaching, guidance, and calling of God to the work of the ministry, antecedent to all other calling whatsoever. Our brethren of the established church are so sensible of this, that the ordaining pastors lay hands suddenly on no man, but puts this home question to all the candidates for the ministry, “ Do you trust that
 “ you are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost,
 “ to take upon you this office and ministrations ? ” To which the candidate answers,
 “ I trust so.” Those men that scoff, and deny, and ridicule the inward teaching, guidance, and calling of God to the ministry, never let them boast of being the sons of the church, seeing they give their pretended mother the lie, and represent all her bishops and ministers as a parcel of—I will not say what, because I will not help forward with the scandal. But

Secondly, Being fully persuaded of our calling of God to this work, let us go on with all diligence in the duties thereof ; *let us give ourselves to the ministry of the word and prayer ; let us give ourselves to reading and meditation, that our profiting may appear to all.* Let us not neglect the gift of God that is in us, but study to shew ourselves approved unto God, *workmen that need not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*^b. Let us pray that God would make us able ministers of the New Testament, and of *the truth as it is Jesus Christ* ; that our gospel may not go in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance ; that we may

^a Rom. viii. 5.

^b 2 Tim. ii. 15.

may be *eloquent men, and mighty in the scriptures*; and *help them much that have believed through grace*^a. That we may be sons of thunder to the stout-hearted, that are far from righteousness, and sons of consolation to the feeble-minded; that we may support the weak, bind up the broken-hearted, and speak comfortable things to all the freemen of the *new Jerusalem*. And let us be *an example of the believers in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity*, that no man may have any just cause to despise us^b. And,

Thirdly, Let us feed the flock of God with the pure word of God. Our dear Lord bid *Peter feed his sheep and lambs*; and *Peter* bids the Christians, *as new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that they might grow thereby*^c. The Apostle *Peter* certainly fed them with that food which he bid them desire, and he certainly bid them desire that food which the Lord bid him feed his sheep and lambs with. The Apostle *Paul*, although he had received an extraordinary mission and gifts from Jesus Christ, yet he did not disdain to read, as appears by the value that he set upon his books, *giving charge that they should be sent unto him, especially the parchments*^d. He valued his books much, but his parchments more. So in like manner, let us set a due value upon well-chosen books; but above all, let us be well read in the sacred writings, that we may (like *Apollos* of old) *be eloquent men, and mighty in the scripture*; that we may (if God see meet) *be able to convince gain-sayers, and help them much that have believed through grace*; let us take heed to ourselves, and

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^a 1 Theff. i. 5. Acts xviii. 24, 27.^b 1 Tim. iv.

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^c 1 Pet. ii. 2.^d 2 Tim. iv. 13.

to our doctrine. Let us carefully avoid the wood, hay, stubble doctrine of the inventions, traditions, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth, and let us build upon the glorious foundation Jesus Christ, the eternal rock of ages; the gold, silver, precious stone doctrine of the plain, eternal, soul-nourishing truths, concerning that great salvation, *which was begun to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will^a.* Let us hold fast the form of sound words, even the good and wholesome words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the doctrine which is according to godliness. Let us not therefore give into doubtful disputations, nor turn aside into vain jangling, striving about words to no purpose. Let us not lead them into the rank weeds of the traditions and commandments of men, but into the green pastures of the pure word of God, and cause them to lie down beside the still waters, even the eternal God, who is the fountain of living waters, that they may rest and refresh their weary souls in his power, wisdom, and mercy, in and through Jesus Christ, the chief shepherd and bishop of souls.

Fourthly and Lastly, May we always be able to give an account of ourselves in the words of our text, *we have been gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children*. Let us cherish the children of God with the *sincere milk of the word*, in their faith, and hope and comfort. Let us labour to cherish all good beginnings. Are any setting their faces Zion-wards? Let

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^a Heb. ii. 3, 4.

us lead them on to Jesus Christ, and strengthen their hand in God, by encouraging their faith and hope in God. May we thus *labour in the work of the ministry, to perfect the saints, and edify the body of Christ*. May we always have our eyes upon the chief shepherd of the sheep, that we may put on the gentleness of Christ, who is a leading shepherd, and not a driving one. A shepherd that scares and worries them must go behind his flock, or else he cannot drive them; but our Lord giveth this beautiful description of himself, as a shepherd, that *he leadeth them out, that he goeth before them and calleth them by name, and they hear his voice and follow him*^a; alluding to the custom and practice of tender good shepherds, who open the fold, and call their sheep, and walk on before them, and the sheep run after them, knowing the shepherd's voice, and that he is leading them to their pasture. And the prophet thus describes our Lord feeding his flock, *As a shepherd gathering the lambs in his arms, and carrying them in his bosom, and gently leading them that are with young*^b; alluding to careful shepherds, that carry the feeble lambs in their arms over difficult places. Does the chief shepherd lead, nay gently lead the flock? And shall we think to drive with force and power? We are indeed to exhort and reprove, and rebuke with all authority; but then it is to be observed, *it must be* (according to the Apostle's rule) *with all long-suffering and doctrine*^c. The lovers of power and force, the men of dominion, and the advocates for wholesome severities, would do well to consider the words of Christ: *The evil servant that shall say in his heart, my lord delayeth his coming,*
and

^a John x. 3.^b Isa. xl. 11.^c 2 Tim. iv. 2.

and shall begin to smite his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not ware of, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth^a. Men are not to be tortured into faith, nor dragooned into Christianity; but to be meekly instructed, if God peradventure may give them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth. Certainly we are not to demolish the body to instruct the mind. Whatever others do, let us copy after the great Shepherd of the sheep, of whom it is written, *the bruised reed shall be not break, and smoking flax shall be not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory*^b. The Lord draweth his people, and they run after him; he *maketh his people a willing people in the day of his power*. He will have no pressed men in his service; his soldiers must be all volunteers.

I shall conclude with the exhortive and consolatory words of two inspired Apostles. *The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed; feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock; and when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away*^c. Know ye not that they which run in a race, run all, but one obtaineth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for

^a Matt. xxiv. 48.^b Matt. xii. 20.^c 1 Pet.

for the mastery, is temperate in all things : now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible^a. Blessed are they that bear the word of God, and keep it. Be ye therefore doers of the word, and not hearers only.

^a 1 Cor. xi. 24, 25.

F I N I S.



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